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STANA NENADIC

## Experience and Expectations in the Transformation of the Highland Gentlewoman, 1680 to 1820

The history of the eighteenth-century Highlands has been written as though no woman, other than Flora Macdonald, ever lived there. This is easily understood. A focus on clanship and its martial functions, which has only been intensified by an over-arching preoccupation with the politics of Jacobitism, has tended to marginalise the female experience.<sup>1</sup> More recent concern with the economics of Highland estates has also ignored the role of women.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Highland gentlewoman, transformed during the decades of the 'long-eighteenth-century', played a significant part in this story. For the character of this transformation not only mirrored aspects of broader change among the Scottish gentry, but was also a significant factor in the changing use of estates and in evolving relationships between the landowning elite and the ordinary people who lived and worked in the Highlands.

Most of the women who form the focus of what follows were connected, either as wives or daughters, with the Campbells of Barcaldine in the Benderloch area of northern Argyllshire.<sup>3</sup> Part of the patronage network of the earls of Breadalbane, the Campbells of Barcaldine were typical of the middle and upper laird class. Through a combination of astute political judgement, good professional and commercial links, advanced estate policies and strategic marriages the family experienced an increase in wealth, and the head of the family saw his status rise from chamberlain to the earl of Breadalbane in the later seventeenth century to gentleman and baronet by the early nineteenth century. Their independent landholdings in 1688 were modest. By 1751 the family was sixteenth in the league table of Argyllshire landowners and tenth in 1802.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B. Lenman, *Integration and Enlightenment: Scotland, 1746-1832* (Edinburgh, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> A. I. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996); A. I. Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom from clanship to commercial landlordism', in S. Foster, A. I. Macinnes and R. Macinnes (eds.), *Scottish Power Centres from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Glasgow, 1998), 162-190; R. A. Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c.1493-1820* (Edinburgh, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> National Archives of Scotland [NAS], Campbell of Barcaldine Papers, GD 170.

<sup>4</sup> A. I. Macinnes 'Who owned Argyll in the eighteenth century?', in *Power, Property and Privilege: The Landed Elite in Scotland from c.1440 to 1914* (St Andrews, 1989). See also, A. I. Macinnes, 'Landownership, land use and elite enterprise in Scottish Gaeldom: From clanship to clearance in Argyllshire, 1688-1858', in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Scottish Elites* (Edinburgh, 1994).

Reflecting their status, a cadet branch of the family – Campbell of Glenure – was established in the 1740s. But after nearly a century of economic success, a gradual decline set in. Mounting debts resulted in the sale of the Glenure property in 1815 and the Barcaldine estate was lost in 1842. The head of the family in the mid-nineteenth century was landless. He was employed as agent to the marquis of Breadalbane and died in retirement in Wimbledon near London.

In 1680 the wife or daughter of a laird such as Campbell of Barcaldine was born, lived and died within the Highland counties without once venturing forth to the Lowlands or beyond. She was illiterate, and though competent in English – a distinguishing characteristic of the gentry<sup>5</sup> — most of her conversation was in Gaelic. Her daily routines were built around the practical business of running a household and farm. She was skilled in spinning and cheese-making, spent much time engaged in ordinary cooking indoors and had daily outdoor contact with animals and the vegetable garden. Her life and experience were certainly different to those of the ordinary peasant women who were her daily contacts. Her house was more comfortable, her clothing was of higher quality and in the Lowland style,<sup>6</sup> her husband was powerful and she was educated in the Highland manner to be a ‘gentlewoman’. But it was still a life of hard work lived within a narrow cultural compass, especially when compared with the experience of the Highland gentleman.

By 1820, the Barcaldine woman was born and mostly raised within the Lowlands and in particular in Edinburgh. Her first language was English and her knowledge of Gaelic was limited. Her visits to the Highlands were seasonal and mostly undertaken as family holidays during the summer. Her daily routines were built around leisure and consumption and were mainly conducted indoors. She was skilled in music-making and fancy sewing. The life and experience of ordinary peasant women were so remote as to be viewed, at best, as ‘picturesque’. Her travel experience embraced England and sometimes Europe, North America or India. Yet despite her detachment from the real culture, the day-to-day work and the topography of the Highlands, she still regarded herself as a ‘Highland Gentlewoman’. Her whole identity revolved around an imaginative construction of an idealised Gaelic culture and a real preoccupation with family history and the ownership of land and houses in the Highland counties. Unlike their men folk, women of this type were probably, for the most part, blind to the practical realities and sometimes harsh consequences of economic modernisation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> E. Burt, *Letters from the North of Scotland* [1754], with an introduction by C. W. J. Withers (Edinburgh, 1998), 238.

<sup>6</sup> Highland gentry women had adopted Lowland dress by the early 17th century, though according to Burt, *Letters*, 235, in the 1730s they still sometimes walked abroad unshod.

<sup>7</sup> On the conflict between backward-looking myth building and economic progress, see P. Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (London, 1989).

The experience and expectations of this later woman are easily uncovered through numerous surviving records.<sup>8</sup> Piecing together the details of the lives of Highland gentry women before the mid-eighteenth century is fraught with difficulty.<sup>9</sup> Rates of literacy were lower than those of equivalent women elsewhere and were dramatically lower than those of the well-educated Highland gentleman.<sup>10</sup> Even when women did send the occasional letter, these were not preserved in the extensive family archives that were maintained by men.<sup>11</sup> There are no domestic account books, no diaries or recollections, no novels or other literature penned by such women before the later eighteenth century, as there were in other cultures and particularly in England by the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup> Other than the ubiquitous pastry-books that were normally purchased for teenage girls in preparation for marriage, there were no women's books in household inventories before mid-century.<sup>13</sup> By the time these gentlewomen were 'empowered' by the art of reading and writing in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, they were mostly living outside the Highlands.

The want of a robust written record inevitably renders the lives of early gentry women obscure. Despite being members of an advanced Protestant clan such as Campbell of Barcaldine, the women of this family were not yet part of the modernising, Anglified world of letters to which their menfolk belonged. Their lives were still rooted in the pre-modern traditions of Gaeldom and in oral discourses.<sup>14</sup> They probably knew more of local peasant affairs than their husbands and sons – who were frequently absent from the Highlands – and had a more

<sup>8</sup> The correspondence of the Campbells of Barcaldine, NAS, GD170, includes large numbers of female letters and other documents from c.1780.

<sup>9</sup> The equivalent gentlewoman in England is much more easily understood. See A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London, 1998). Other areas of the Celtic fringe had a similar experience to Highland Scotland. See M. Roberts and S. Clarke (eds.), *Women and Gender in Early-Modern Wales* (Cardiff, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Male Highland gentry were required by law – Statutes of Iona of 1609 and 1616 – to be educated in English in the Lowlands. In the absence of sons, elder daughters were under the same obligation, though this was widely ignored. See D. U. Stiubhart, 'Women and gender in the early modern Western Gaidhealtachd', in E. Ewan and M. M. Meikle (eds.), *Women in Scotland, c.1100-1750* (East Linton, 1999), 241.

<sup>11</sup> Evidence that women's letters were sent and received, but not preserved, can be noted in the extensive correspondence of men such as Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine in the early 18th century: NAS, GD170.

<sup>12</sup> On European literacy-rates and gentry women's writing, see O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800* (London, 1995), ch.11. On the Scottish dimension, see R. A. Houston, 'Women in the economy and society of Scotland, 1500-1800', in R. A. Houston and I. D. Whyte (eds.), *Scottish Society, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1989), 118-47.

<sup>13</sup> At about the age of fifteen or sixteen, when engaged in the short period of education prior to marriage that included training in the art of writing, a Bible and a 'pastry book' or cookbook were normally purchased for a daughter by her father. These are never listed in household inventories.

<sup>14</sup> See C. W. J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London, 1988).

intimate knowledge of Gaelic language and customs.<sup>15</sup> Though no Campbell women of the period achieved fame in the sphere of poetry and song, several gentlewomen who were significant in this area of oral culture – and whose reputations have survived – did live adjacent to the Barcaldine estate.<sup>16</sup>

In pre-modern Gaeldom, among both peasants and gentry, women were the guardians of certain types of learning, conveyed from mother to daughter in the form of oral knowledge, whose purpose was healing or the valorisation of the clan and its heroes through histories and genealogy. Gentry women certainly possessed knowledge of traditional healing methods.<sup>17</sup> Well-settled and wealthy counties like Argyllshire or Perthshire had a good representation of professional surgeons to draw on, but earlier types of healer still practised and were commonly sought.<sup>18</sup> John Stewart of Fassnacloich was in despair in 1704 when he wrote to his cousin Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine: ‘my Father is still troubled with a pain that is in his right side and can get nothing that can do him any good and being informed that there is a gentlewoman at Taymouth [seat of the earl of Breadalbane in Perthshire] that has good skill in curing many ... [I] write to you to know your opinion.’<sup>19</sup> Whether she was consulted or effected any help is unknown. Another insight to the importance of female knowledge is given in a letter of 1734 by John Campbell of Achallader, who was chamberlain to the earl of Breadalbane. Writing to his brother-in-law Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine, he mentions that he has a female relative visiting his house of Auchmore in Perthshire, a Mrs Cameron of Errocht, who ‘has been here this fortnight giving the history of the living and the dead from Benderloch to Lochaber since Oliver Cromwell’s days’.<sup>20</sup> He was amused by this, but also regarded Mrs Cameron’s genealogical discourses as worth mentioning to his kinsman.

As these remarks suggest, what we know of early gentry women is mainly gleaned from the correspondence of men or from occasional legal documents.<sup>21</sup> Their social world was complex but much of it evades

<sup>15</sup> On bilingualism among gentry women in Wales, see S. Clarke, ‘Visions of community: Elizabeth Baker and late 18th century Merioneth’, in Roberts and Clarke, *Women and Gender*, 234–258.

<sup>16</sup> Post-Reformation poetic endeavour was more characteristic of women of Catholic families than of Protestant background. Traditional women’s poetry had a strong spiritual and religious dimension, a characteristic that was heightened by the Counter-Reformation activity of some elite Catholic women. See Stiubhart, ‘Women and gender’, in Ewan and Meikle, *Women in Scotland*.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Ferrier’s novel *Marriage*, first published in 1818 and mostly set in the Highlands, gives a prominent role to Lady MacLaughlan, a matriarchal figure whose main preoccupation is traditional medicines.

<sup>18</sup> Medical practice in early-modern Gaelic society was a complex issue. See J. Bannerman, *The Beatoins: A Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> NAS, GD170/689.

<sup>20</sup> NAS, GD170/797/173.

<sup>21</sup> In practice there are relatively few legal documents that refer to women. Out of 1,500 Campbell of Argyll documents (c.1700) only 112 mention women. See R. Reddington-Wilde, ‘A woman’s place: Birth order, gender and social status in Highland houses’, in Ewan and Meikle, *Women in Scotland*.

detailed observation. In order to gain a better understanding of the often elusive early Highland gentlewoman, it is necessary first to appreciate the place and role of women in clan society. Clanship was a residual form of feudalism. Feudal societies allocated status and honour on the basis of service to the feudal superior and that service was intrinsically male and military. The decline of feudalism in Europe from the Middle Ages was matched by the rising status and increased legal rights of women.<sup>22</sup> No such decline had occurred in the Highlands of Scotland, for though systematic Roman law and civil control from the centre had been imposed since the early seventeenth century and the clan system of land allocation had been eroded by commerce since the later seventeenth century,<sup>23</sup> clans continued to be driven by deeply entrenched feudal cultural norms. The Reformation introduced a complicating factor. In Catholic families the power of women increased in some spheres as they assumed the role of maintaining traditional religious culture – a role that was politically dangerous for men. In Protestant families, the power of women – already low – was eroded as it was elsewhere in Protestant society.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless of religion, the role of women under the system of clanship was to get married and produce children, particularly sons, to preserve the security and fuel the expansion of their husband's clan. On marriage they made a legal and financial transition into the clan of their husband,<sup>25</sup> but the cultural contours of clanship determined that they and the men of their new clan still regarded the clan-of-birth as a focus for emotional attachment. This raised a contradiction of loyalty and responsibility that led to many real problems for widows. The other role of the Highland gentlewomen was to run her husband's household, if she was lucky enough to get a husband. In gentry society, marriages were tied to political and economic considerations. A woman's chance of marriage was related to her dowry, which – like male inheritance – was determined by her place in the birth-order of siblings.<sup>26</sup> Eldest daughters were more likely to marry than younger ones and they usually married young. The responsibility for a husband's household was sometimes assumed at a remarkably early age if the husband was older and had a full household. This and other aspects of the role of a wife is illustrated by the life and experience of Janet Mackay of Bighouse, who married Colin Campbell of Glenure, son of Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine, in 1749.

Janet Mackay (1732-1775)<sup>27</sup> was the eldest daughter of Hugh Mackay of Bighouse in Sutherland, an impoverished middling laird of military

<sup>22</sup> For a broad discussion, see M. E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1993), 30-31.

<sup>23</sup> Macinnes, *Clanship*; Dodgshon, *Chiefs to Landlords*.

<sup>24</sup> Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, ch. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Reddington-Wilde, 'A woman's place', in Ewan and Meikle, *Women in Scotland*, 207.

<sup>26</sup> On birth-order and inheritance for both men and women, see R. Reddington-Wilde, 'The power of place: Spatial analysis and social organization of the Campbells in Early Modern Argyll, Scotland' (Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 1995), ch. 5.

<sup>27</sup> The details of Janet Mackay's life are gleaned from Campbell of Barcaldine Papers, NAS, GD170, and the Mackay of Bighouse Papers, NAS, GD87.



background with good family connections to Lord Reay. She was born and raised in the far north of Scotland before being sent to Edinburgh in the autumn of 1748, aged sixteen, for a brief education in genteel accomplishments. While in Edinburgh, she was introduced to adult society and set on the task of finding a husband – an ordinary girl engaged in the normal experience of one of her status. She quickly fulfilled her family's expectations. Colin Campbell of Glenure, more than twice her age and still a bachelor, was a laird from a rising family of greater wealth than hers. Having terminated his own military career, he sought to marry and settle on his estate. He courted Janet in Edinburgh, before travelling to Sutherland, in company with one of his brothers-in-law, to meet with her father, while allowing the Mackay family lawyer to enquire into his property and finances. The affair moved swiftly to a successful resolution. As Hugh Mackay wrote to his lawyer in April 1749:

Glenure is agreeable and he does not want of the Highlandman in him... I have no objection to the man himself in the general view, or to his family and circumstances if equal to the account I have from you ... so if Mr Campbell is Jenny Mackay's choice for a companion in life, I approve and consent frankly as I would to any reasonable thing in my power that would make her happy – and if she loves the man it would be imprudent to reject the proposal.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that Glenure had offered a generous settlement on his future wife, should he die, added to the felicity of the match from the father's point of view since he could provide only a relatively small dowry.

Glenure and Janet were married in Edinburgh and at the age of seventeen she went into Argyllshire, at a great distance from all her family, to begin married life on the remote estate of Glenure. This was also a typical experience and the feelings of dislocation and loss that it generated in gentry women was a stock subject of their poetry and song.<sup>29</sup> Janet was mistress of a comfortable modern house, comprising six rooms with a garret and a newly-built kitchen wing.<sup>30</sup> After marriage, she lived entirely at Glenure, making a single trip to Edinburgh with her husband in the early months of 1750 and receiving a lengthy visit from her younger sister in the following year. She could and did ride, but extensive social visiting among neighbours was not possible from such a remote area when there was so much work to do at home and she was pregnant for much of the time – though occasional visits, and ritualised riding out among the tenantry as a device for cementing clan loyalties, were probably undertaken from time-to-time.<sup>31</sup> Her husband, in addition to managing his own prop-

<sup>28</sup> NAS, Campbell of Barcaldine Papers, GD170/972/2/2.

<sup>29</sup> A. C. Frater, 'Women of the Gaidhealtachd and their songs to 1750', in Ewan and Meikle, *Women in Scotland*; Stiubhart, 'Women and gender', in *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> NAS, GD170/329; *Argyll: An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments vol 2, Lorn*, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1975), 256-8.

<sup>31</sup> This practice is described for a later period in J. Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* (London, 1936), 224.

erty, was a Crown factor for extensive forfeited estates to the north of Glenure. He was frequently away on business and obliged to leave his wife alone with considerable responsibilities for someone still in her teens. Whether or not she was happy with this style of living is unrecorded. It was entirely consistent with the typical experience of women of her status, though the frequency of absence of husbands was increasing and this caused resentments in some marriages. Janet's sister-in-law, Margaret MacPherson of Glenorchy, who had lived for many years near Stirling, complained bitterly to her husband in the 1750s at being left alone in the Highlands.<sup>32</sup> It is likely that other women were similarly unhappy.<sup>33</sup>

Janet Mackay had two infant daughters and was pregnant with a third when her husband was killed in 1752 – the victim of the Appin murder<sup>34</sup> – and the young widow was obliged to provide a detailed account for lawyers of the affairs of the household. Much of what she recorded relates to her own labours and that of the servants in her charge. The account also gives an insight into the prosaic comings and goings that even a remote estate was capable of supporting. Janet organised the domestic cooking and was heavily involved in cloth production for her own household use. She oversaw the running of the milkhouse with its extensive commercial cheese and butter-making activities and kept a watchful eye over the meal or gunel house. She managed ten or twelve domestic and farm servants and had daily contacts with a range of people from within the locality who made purchases of butter and cheese, as well as goats and sheep for slaughter.<sup>35</sup> With the children in addition, hers was a very busy and practical life.

When Janet's pregnancy of 1752 produced a third daughter and not a son, she returned to her own family in Sutherland, taking nothing with her but the children and a widow's annuity.<sup>36</sup> The system of clanship valued rapid remarriage in cases of early widowhood. A young widow with proven child-bearing capacity and housekeeping skills could secure a second useful connection for her family. Consistent with this, Janet Mackay was remarried within the year to Charles Baillie of Rosehall.<sup>37</sup> Since none of the girls could inherit the Glenure estate, this passed to their father's

<sup>32</sup> NAS, GD170/1355.

<sup>33</sup> The marriage of Margaret Macpherson and Duncan Campbell of Glenure became increasingly acrimonious, eventually ending in separation. See NAS, GD170/1097. For background and cases, see L. Leneman, *Alienated Affections: The Scottish Experience of Divorce and Separation, 1684-1830* (Edinburgh, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> See S. Carney, *The Appin Murder: The Killing of the Red Fox* (Edinburgh, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> NAS, GD170/391/7.

<sup>36</sup> Female inheritance was sought in some Highland families in the 18th century. Dougal Stewart of Appin, a contemporary and near neighbour of Colin Campbell of Glenure, was succeeded by his only child, Anna, following legal changes to the entail on the estate. See A. Stewart, 'The last chief: Dougal Stewart of Appin (died 1764)', *ante*, lvi (1997), 203-21.

<sup>37</sup> This was initially without her father's consent, though he soon relented. Following the death of her second husband, Janet Mackay was married for a third time to a Mr Hart, an Edinburgh merchant. See Duncan Campbell of Glenure Papers concerning the financial affairs of Janet and her daughters, NAS, GD170/391/7. Also GD170/1313, Letters from Hugh Mackay of Bighouse.



younger brother. In the absence of a father or brother, Colin Campbell's daughters – though supported by the Glenure estate – had little strategic value to the family into which they were born. They and their mother were badly treated by the heir to Glenure, who regarded them as a financial burden. Payments to which they were entitled were frequently disputed, subject to court action and in arrears.<sup>38</sup> The girls were raised partly with the Mackay family in Sutherland and partly in the family of their step-father. One died as a child, one was a life-long spinster and Louisa married her maternal cousin, who was heir to the estate of Mackay of Bighouse. The spinster – Colina – was courted by her Glenure cousin in 1772, but she refused his proposal, possibly because of earlier resentments.<sup>39</sup> The loss of all connection with her father and with the land of her birth was a cause of much sadness for Louisa. She several times petitioned her uncle for a memento of her dead parent. She wanted to purchase a pair of small silver mugs, which were given to her father and mother as a wedding present and which she knew were still in the house at Glenure. Her request, refused by the uncle, was eventually granted by her cousin in 1787.<sup>40</sup>

The legacy of Janet Mackay's early widowhood was difficulty for her and for her daughters. Young widows could at least hope to remarry. Older widows faced greater difficulties in Highland gentry society.<sup>41</sup> A lengthy widowhood could impose a major and much resented burden on a family, even where that family had benefited from the initial income boost that the marriage had brought. Sons resented their widowed mothers for they were a drain on a family to which they did not belong, other than by marriage, absorbing scarce resources they would rather see given to their own children. Widows suffered in this society, though they were not averse to making their complaints known, as suggested by John Campbell of Achallader, chamberlain to the earl of Breadalbane writing to his brother-in-law, Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine. In a long letter from Auchmore on 4 February 1732, he wrote:

This sheet I only intended to cover the gazots and not draw it out the length it has run which I believe has tired you in the reading, which I must say is a sort of relief to me at present from the chit chat of very poor Lady Marchfield by whom I am obliged to sit and have part of her doleful story of 11 children and nothing to give them, her greatest comfort is to be rid of a husband that brought her to that low state.<sup>42</sup>

Campbell of Achallader had also reported in a letter to the same recipient in 1727, 'the old Lady Ardownage was buried Saturday last, I may say without breach of charity, to the no small satisfaction of her son'.<sup>43</sup> Such

<sup>38</sup> There was a significant court action in Edinburgh in 1757, eventually settled in favour of Janet Mackay and her father Hugh Mackay in 1760. NAS, GD170/391/7a.

<sup>39</sup> NAS, GD170/1626.

<sup>40</sup> NAS, GD170/391/7; GD170/1922.

<sup>41</sup> On the broad implications of widowhood, see Hufton, *Prospect Before Her*, ch. 6.

<sup>42</sup> NAS, GD170/797/21.

<sup>43</sup> NAS, GD170/797/9.

remarks would have struck a chord with Patrick Campbell, for his own mother, Mary Campbell of Lochnell, outlived his father by nearly twenty years.

Mary Campbell of Lochnell (c.1652-1739) was born into one of the senior families of Lorn in Argyllshire, whose rising fortunes were closely tied to the advance of the dukes of Argyll.<sup>44</sup> In 1688 the family was thirteenth in the Argyllshire financial league table. In 1751 they had risen to fifth place, and by 1802 they were fourth.<sup>45</sup> The Campbells of Lochnell were a richer and more important family than the Campbells of Barcaldine, and when Mary married Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine (1647-1720) in 1676, she brought a good dowry along with important political connections. Her marriage into a lesser family than her own reflected the fact that she was not an eldest daughter. As a wife she lived in Barcaldine Castle – a small tower-house of sixteenth-century construction – where she raised a large family and led a practical domestic life similar to that of Janet Mackay. Periodically, as when the castle was occupied by government troops in the early 1690s, she and the children moved to a farmhouse in Auchinryre where her husband held land.<sup>46</sup> She never travelled beyond the Highlands. Mary had four adult sons and three adult daughters, with as many infants and children that died young. Her eldest son, Patrick, was born in 1677, when she was sixteen, and her youngest surviving child was born in 1705, when she was forty-four. She saw the birth of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. While her husband was alive, she was pivotal to the affairs of the Barcaldine family.

The detailed financial provision for Mary's widowhood was made by her husband in 1716.<sup>47</sup> It was generous, befitting the standing of a matriarch of good family and the respect in which she was held. She was granted an annuity of 600 merks Scots (£60 sterling) and she was life rented the castle, surrounding land, animals and all domestic movables 'excepting the hail silverwork and arms the best clock, cabinet and table', these going to Patrick, the heir. According to the terms of her husband's will, all of the life-rented property was, at her death, to become the absolute property of her eldest grandson, John. Her son Patrick, his wife and their growing family were to live in a new mansion called Dalfuir House, completed in the early 1720s.<sup>48</sup>

These provisions by the father were not, however, respected by son or grandson. Following widowhood, there was intense pressure on Mary Campbell to relinquish her property. A large part of her life-rented land was set aside for her grandson's use in the early 1720s, when he was looking for opportunities to work on his own account and complained bitterly of his lack of financial independence.<sup>49</sup> When John married in

<sup>44</sup> Details of the family and their houses are given in *Argyll: an Inventory*, 261-7.

<sup>45</sup> Macinnes, 'Who owned Argyll?'

<sup>46</sup> *Barcaldine Castle Guide* (Oban, n.d.), 8.

<sup>47</sup> NAS GD170/243/10.

<sup>48</sup> A description of this house, also known as Barcaldine House, is given in *Argyll: An Inventory*, 253.

<sup>49</sup> NAS, GD170/793/6.

1728, he and his wife set up house in Barcaldine Castle and the widow moved out with few possessions. She first went to lodge with one of her married daughters at Acha. She lived with Patrick at Dalfuir House from the late 1720s to early 1730s. She then moved to Glenmackrie, a farm in a remote upland cattle-raising area to the south, to lodge with another married daughter from 1734 to 1738. Her final home and place of death was with her third daughter Mary and son-in-law Stewart of Innernahyle at their farm on the Appin peninsula. Throughout this time her annuity was in arrears and she was often unable to pay her daughters for food and board. Relationships with her eldest son were tense and at several times she threatened to take him to court over the matter.<sup>50</sup>

This seemingly harsh treatment was the product of scarce resources in a cash-poor environment. There was a shortage of good housing in the Highlands and considerable demand from lairds and their sons for access to quality land for farming. These economic conditions, along with the social dynamics of clanship, ensured that few gentry households were headed by women. Widows either voluntarily relinquished their rights in the interests of their male kin,<sup>51</sup> or were pressured into doing so.<sup>52</sup> In rural Argyllshire in 1748, only 9% of houses eligible for window tax – possessed of ten windows or more – were recorded in the name of women.<sup>53</sup> Almost certainly these were widows with sons who were minors. Women alone tended to gravitate towards towns on the fringes of the Highlands, where domestic property was easily available through the rental market. In towns such as Inverness, Perth, Stirling or Crieff, the cost of living was lower for women than in the rural Highlands and lower, of course, than in the big cities.<sup>54</sup> In Inverness in 1753, 20% of its largest houses – those eligible for window tax – were held by women.<sup>55</sup> The other advantage of living in a town was access to credit. Women had difficulty gaining credit in rural areas, unless they were acting on behalf of a husband. Credit if it was available was more expensive than for men, because there were fewer opportunities for reciprocal exchange. Living in towns was cheaper and easier for women alone, and such arrangements often suited their families. Mature and responsible women acted as agents for other women still living in the Highlands. They chose clothing and textiles and carried out various commissions on their behalf. They also provided lodging facilities. When Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine sent his children to Perth and Edinburgh for their teenage

<sup>50</sup> NAS, GD170/768/1-3. Letters to Patrick Campbell of Barcaldine from his uncle Donald Campbell of Balighown. Donald Campbell reluctantly wrote on behalf of the old lady.

<sup>51</sup> A case of this sort (Campbells of Kilberry c.1716), which also involved spinster daughters giving up their financial rights, is detailed in Reddington-Wilde, 'Power of Place', 201-8.

<sup>52</sup> On the financial pressures that families imposed on widows, see B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1989), ch.13.

<sup>53</sup> NAS, Argyllshire Window Tax, E326/1/7.

<sup>54</sup> The cost and availability of accommodation meant that small towns were favoured by single women of genteel background throughout Britain. The cost advantages of urban living for gentry families in general are detailed by Jane Austen in her novel *Persuasion*, first published in 1822.

<sup>55</sup> NAS, Invernesshire Window Tax, E326/1/54.

education in the 1720s and 1730s, they lived with female members of his extended family, who provided food and lodgings and kept a watchful eye over the youngsters. When he or his grown sons travelled to Edinburgh, they did so in stages, with overnight accommodation en route with their female kin in places like Crieff.

Widows found it difficult to maintain a place in Highland gentry society and so too did unmarried women, of which there were large and growing numbers. The privileging of a kinship system based on agnatic connections and the rising costs of dowry – a feature of the early modern gentry throughout Europe<sup>56</sup> – when compounded by the growing rates of absence of young men from the Highlands as they sought to make their fortunes elsewhere, ensured that there were high levels of lifetime spinsterhood among gentry women in the first half of the eighteenth century. As many as one-third never married. Money for their support was scarce within families. Such women had little social role to play in the rural context and few devices for making their own independent living in the rural economy.

Daughters who failed to marry and had no financial provisions from their families quickly tumbled down the social hierarchy. Many became domestic ‘hangers-on’, servants in all but name, obliged to live in the homes of relatives and provide services of one sort or another, their presence no more likely to be noted than the presence of a servant. Flora Macdonald, the Jacobite heroine, was destined for such obscurity before she made her famed contribution to history. She was born into a tacksman’s family on South Uist. Her father died when she was young, her mother remarried and Flora lived on the margins of her brother’s family when he succeeded to the tack. She had no provision for a dowry, no education and had never been beyond the Highlands. Though a lesser gentleman’s daughter, she spent her early womanhood hard at work at the spindle or in the byre. Her famed exploits with Prince Charles Edward Stuart made her fortune. While a prisoner in London, sympathisers raised a subscription of £1,500 for her support. This remarkable sum far exceeded that available to most gentry women. It allowed her to spend a season in Edinburgh, where – in addition to being a drawing-room sensation – she learned to write and acquired other genteel skills and refinements of the sort that were normally taught at the age of sixteen. The money also allowed her to marry in 1750 at the late age of twenty-eight, to a kinsman of higher rank. Her dowry was £700 – a handsome sum with which her husband purchased a stock of cattle for a good tack on Skye.<sup>57</sup>

Flora Macdonald’s route to self-made fortune was unique. Other women who took the self-made path usually did so through exploiting

<sup>56</sup> Detailed in L. Stone and J. C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1800* (Oxford, 1984); L. Stone, *Family and Fortune: Studies in Aristocratic Finance in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1973).

<sup>57</sup> W. Jolly, *Flora Macdonald in Uist: A Study of the Heroine in her Native Surroundings* (Perth, 1886).

the opportunities offered by urban commerce.<sup>58</sup> Grocery businesses were popular among women and required little capital. Duncan Campbell, who inherited the Glenure estate in 1752, married the daughter of a Glenorchy cattle dealer and one of his sisters-in-law ran such a business in Glasgow in the 1740s and 1750s.<sup>59</sup> His widowed daughter-in-law, who had been the wife of his illegitimate son, Major Alexander Campbell, set herself up as a tea retailer in Glasgow in 1786.<sup>60</sup> Single women with good looks and some cultural attainment could make a business as a mantua-maker or milliner, though this was more expensive and competitive and required apprenticeship training. Women of the lesser gentry in both Scotland and England were sometimes raised in the expectation that in case they did not marry, they should be provided with the skills to allow them to support themselves.<sup>61</sup> Isabella Macpherson (born in 1745), who was the daughter of Colin Campbell of Glenure, provides an example.

When Colin Campbell was murdered in 1752 he left financial provision for four natural daughters, to be administered by his heir, who – needless to say – resented the financial burden.<sup>62</sup> For a father to acknowledge and to make good provision for his illegitimate children was normal in Highland gentry culture.<sup>63</sup> Each of the girls had a capital sum of £100 sterling, to be invested in the Glenure estate at 10% annual interest. The capital and interest were for the cost of their upbringing, for apprenticeship fees and modest dowries. Isabella Macpherson – whose mother lived in the Glenorchy area – was fostered by John Bane McIntyre, a herd in Calnish in Glenorchy, from 1752 to 1756 at a cost of £5 10s 4d, a small sum reflecting the primitive nature of life in this household. In May 1756, aged eleven, she moved into the household of John Campbell, miller at Kinckrakin, also in Glenorchy, close to the small town of Dalmally. Here she began the process of integration into adult society and was introduced to female skills and accomplishments of a higher order than those previously available to her. The cost of boarding for two years was £11 13s 4d, and charges were also made for ‘furnishing her in cloaths, linnens, shoon, reeding school dues, books, dancing school dues and every other necessary’.<sup>64</sup> Her older half-sister, Peggy, whom she had never met before, joined her at Kinckrakin in 1757. Isabella and Peggy then moved to

<sup>58</sup> As did many younger sons in the early 18th century. See D. Graham-Campbell, ‘The younger generation in Argyll at the beginning of the eighteenth century’, *Scottish Studies*, xviii (1974), 83–94. On women in urban commerce, see E. Sanderson, *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh* (Basingstoke, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> NAS, GD170/1097.

<sup>60</sup> NAS, GD170/1705.

<sup>61</sup> Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, ch. 6, gives examples.

<sup>62</sup> NAS, GD170/391/8.

<sup>63</sup> Such children were treated like younger legitimate children, but had no rights of inheritance. See Frater, ‘Women of the Gaidhealtachd and their songs’. When Colin Campbell of Glenure was murdered in 1752 his companion and clerk was Mungo Campbell, a trained solicitor and the natural son of Colin’s half-brother, John Campbell of Barcaldine. See Carney, *Appin Murder*.

<sup>64</sup> NAS, GD170/391/8.

the town of Crieff in June 1758. They lodged in the household of Duncan Robertson, a merchant and business associate of their paternal uncle Robert Campbell, merchant in Stirling. The cost of annual boarding was £6 for each, a step up from Kinckrakin. Nearby was another uncle, John Campbell of Barcaldine, Crown factor on the forfeited Perthshire estates. Various Barcaldine children were educated in Crieff at this time and would have had daily contact with the girls and recognised them as cousins. Duncan Campbell, heir to the Glenure estate and also an uncle, was close at hand. A lawyer by profession, Duncan took a particular interest in his niece Isabella, who visited his house near Stirling in 1760. Duncan's wife was Mary McPherson of Glenorchy, a family connection of Isabella's mother.

Life in Crieff offered hitherto unexperienced pleasures and Peggy and 'Bell' engaged in conspicuous consumption of clothing and textiles for their future lives. Some clothing was made for them, some they made themselves under the instruction of a local tailor. They continued their lessons in reading and writing, attended a sewing school, a dancing school and learned music and arithmetic. They went to balls, they started to wear stays and each had a Bible purchased for her. Regular church attendance was now possible and contributions to church collections became part of their accounts. Peggy was married in early 1761, aged seventeen, to Duncan Macdiarmid, eldest son of John Macdiarmid, a tenant farmer, whom she had met in Crieff. She remained in the area for the rest of her life, making occasional trips to Edinburgh.

Isabella was more favoured than her sister. Her writing skills were more sophisticated, she was clever and she was a kinswoman by marriage of Duncan Campbell of Glenure. She was also physically attractive. She was destined by her relatives for a life in business in a flourishing area of the women's luxury trades, one that depended on personal appearance and genteel taste as well as skills. In July 1761, aged sixteen, she was 'bound and engaged' as an apprentice in Stirling to Miss Jean Christie, a mantua-maker; an arrangement made by Robert and Duncan Campbell, her uncles, in a town where both had extensive business interests and where the former was a merchant burgess. The apprentice fee was £16, paid in three portions.<sup>65</sup> The legal indenture specified that she was to be maintained in 'bed, board and washing in family with [Miss Christie] in a suitable manner' and that her hours of work and duties were to be defined by her mistress for the three years of the apprenticeship, 'only that during the currency of the first year of the said service [she] will have the liberty and freedom of one hour each day for attending any schools in the town of Stirling as she shall be advised for her improvement in writing or otherwise'. She served two of the three years before the contract was terminated and the account for her maintenance was closed because she married. The balance due to her husband as dowry was £106 4s 10d.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> A large sum for the period. See Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, 92, 95.

<sup>66</sup> NAS, GD170/391/8.



Had Isabella gone on to establish herself in trade, she might – depending on her skills as a dressmaker, her business acumen and continued good health – have risen to be a woman of substance in her own right. It was a flourishing area of trade and most mantua-makers also traded in haberdashery and fancy textiles. Her family connections and close familiarity with Highland life would have served her well for both customers and credit. At some point in the future, in her own household in Stirling, she might have provided lodgings for one of the rising Campbell children – a valued spinster kinswoman giving useful family service in a town on the Highland fringes. She might also, of course, have failed to flourish, particularly if ill-health had struck. In these circumstances she might have spent her days as a failing, petitioning family hanger-on of the type that figured from time-to-time in the correspondence of the Campbells of Barcaldine and Glenure. Her fate as a married woman is unknown, for with the closing of the account for her maintenance and the payment of her tocher, she vanished from the family records.

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As the eighteenth century advanced, women alone as spinsters or widows were increasingly likely to be pushed into the urban consumer economy. This offered short-term benefits to Highland gentry families, but also entailed long-term negative consequences. These women were exposed to styles of living and individualistic cultural expectations that were inevitably expensive and at odds with conventional female experience in the rural clan context. New ideas were raised and disseminated through female networks that included women who had little personal contact with Lowland urban life. This fuelled the demand that their lives be different – more comfortable, more ‘genteel’ and more akin to that of the Lowland gentry – which in turn fuelled the male anxiety about the cost of their womenfolk. Men, of course, were also absorbing modern ideas of genteel social behaviour towards women.

When James Boswell visited the Highlands of Scotland in 1773, in company with Samuel Johnson, it was with the intention of finding and observing a primitive people and an ancient system of social organisation before it vanished. They were already too late. Modern forms of social behaviour were now practised in many families. Spiralling rents and emigration fever had taken hold. Absenteeism was rising and the ‘mean-spirited’ manner of living among some of the clan elite was a source of dismay.<sup>67</sup> Boswell had a keen eye for social detail and took careful note of the modes of living of those he encountered. Like the Highlands in general, the lives of the women he described were in a state of transition. Certain families were unchanged from the early part of the century, particularly in remote and poor areas. The Macleods of Raasay, a large family, lived well in the older style and with great hospitality according to Boswell, but had an annual rental income from their land of no

<sup>67</sup> Boswell, *Journal*, 115-8.

more than £300. There were ten daughters of the house, mostly teenagers, but only the eldest, Flora, had been in Edinburgh, 'all the rest were never farther than Applecross, a gentleman's seat in Ross-shire on the opposite coast'.<sup>68</sup> Miss Flora was 'sensible, polite and good humoured ... without any aiming at smartness more than was natural to her'. The sisters appeared happy and to the visitor's eyes lived an idyllic existence, with singing and dancing every evening and an endless stream of visitors to entertain and be entertained by. 'They have not the uneasiness which springs from refined life. They work in every way proper for young ladies. Miss – plays on the guitar. What can disturb them? I can only say that I was disturbed by thinking how poor a chance they had to get husbands.'<sup>69</sup> In the event, all ten were to marry. Flora returned to Edinburgh and was married shortly after to Colonel Mure Campbell, heir to the earl of Loudoun. She was dead within the year following the birth of her first child.

The reference to 'proper work' in Boswell's description meant work indoors in the house, such as sewing and mending and some cooking. Outdoor work or work in the dairy was no longer thought 'proper' for girls of this class, even in the Highlands. Playing the guitar was newly fashionable and would not have been found among earlier generations of Raasay gentlewomen, but the relative immobility of the daughters of this household and their want of exposure to the varieties of education available in the city was consistent with the experience of their mother and grandmother. The availability of cash was the critical factor. This meant that the daughter of a prosperous Highland trader could now enjoy a formal education. In Glenmoriston, Boswell and Johnson passed the night at a change-house 'built of thick turfs and thatched'. The landlord, Macqueen, was a tenant farmer of some education, with a knowledge of Latin and given to writing Gaelic verse. His daughter, who served the guests their tea, was 'a modest civil girl very neatly dressed ... she had been a year at Inverness and learnt reading and writing, sewing, knotting, working lace, and pastry'.<sup>70</sup> In short, she had all the accomplishments that were once exclusive to the gentleman's daughter.

As Boswell observed, there were marked variations in the manner of living among the gentry, and this was reflected in the character of their women. The laird of Lochbuie on Mull, with £1000 in rents per year, was a rich man but he lived in a poor house, had a wife who dressed and behaved like the landlady of an ale-house and a daughter of seventeen as 'wild as any filly in Mull' who had 'never read a play'. The family were described by the wife's brother – Sir Allan Maclean – as 'just antediluvians'.<sup>71</sup> The spinster daughters of the latter were ladylike and pious, as were a number of the women Boswell and Johnson encountered in 1773. The woman who most impressed Johnson in the Highlands was a

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-3.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

Miss Maclean on Erray, 'a little plump elderly young lady in ... a smart beaver hat with a white feather'. She was not a 'mere Highland lady', having spent many years in Glasgow with her father, a clergyman and professor at the University. In Johnson's words, 'she is the most accomplished lady that I have found in the Highlands. She knows French, music and drawing, sews neatly, makes shell-work, and can milk cows; in short, she can do everything. She talks sensibly, and is the first person whom I have found that can translate Erse poetry literally.' She had a particular attachment to the poetry of a notable Mull bard and the topics she chose for an evenings entertainment were an elegy on the exile of one of the Maclean lairds in 1715 and 'a dialogue between two Roman Catholic young ladies, sisters, whether it was better to be a nun or to marry'.<sup>72</sup> Her interest in Gaelic, though founded in her cultural heritage, was of a scholarly character, book-born not oral. Miss Maclean was a Highland gentlewoman deeply imbued with the professional culture of the city. She was a very modern lady, though living in relatively primitive conditions.

Everywhere there were spinsters and the problems of finding marriage partners remained endemic. At Dunvegan Castle, the ancient seat of the chief of Macleod, the regular household comprised the laird and his lady, their children and the four unmarried sisters of the laird, including the eldest of the family. All of the Macleod women were 'bred in England', genteel to a high degree and well read in fashionable subjects. The family lived in straitened circumstances and the inconvenience of their home was an overwhelming preoccupation for Lady Macleod, who wished to move away from the old castle and build a new house on a farm that they owned about five miles from Dunvegan and 'to make gardens and everything fine there'.<sup>73</sup> Her antipathy to the castle annoyed Boswell – he was 'vexed to find the alloy of modern refinement in a lady who had so much old family spirit'. He warned, 'once you quit this rock, this centre of gravity, there is no knowing where you may settle. You move five miles first; then to St Andrews, as the late Laird did; then to Edinburgh; and so on till you end at Hampstead'.<sup>74</sup> He was right, of course, for such a path was followed by many families in the last thirty years of the eighteenth century, including the Campbells of Barcaldine.

Boswell and Johnson's travels brought them into contact with a range of gentry households, from those of clan chiefs to those of professional army officers. At the home of Governor Trapaud at Fort Augustus, they met one of the daughters of Campbell of Barcaldine, who was wife to the governor. Always there were numerous visitors to meet and though the society they enjoyed was greater than usual – the travelling pair were a famous attraction – there was enough in what Boswell described to suggest that extensive sociability was commonplace and that this included women as well as men. In the first half of the eighteenth century extensive visiting was a male phenomenon, other than at times of family

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

necessity such as childbirth attendance by female kin. By the last few decades of the century there appeared to be a rage for visiting among women, who spent less time at home in the day-to-day running of their houses and farms and had more leisure to cultivate sociability. Certain houses could entertain vast numbers for many days at a time. The laird of Raasay had a company of thirty to supper, both men and women, at the time of Boswell's visit, accommodated quite comfortably in a house with eleven 'fine rooms', several of the rooms having a number of beds in them.<sup>75</sup> Gentlemen now travelled with their women-folk when visiting among their neighbours and kin. The laird of the Isle of Muck, making an unannounced visit to Dunvegan Castle, arrived with 'his lady, sister to Talisker; a Miss Maclean, his niece; a Miss Macqueen, a relation (both of them young girls); and Miss Mally Macleod [who was] ... past sixty, but affected youthfulness'.<sup>76</sup> A nephew was already at the castle having travelled before them.

Though praised by Boswell as part of the traditions of clanship, hospitality of this type and scale, with the large presence of women and engagement in cultivated entertainments including dancing, music and poetry, was part of a modern manner of gentry living. The reading of highly emotional Gaelic verse was a Highland variant on the cult of sensibility that was then the fashion in the drawing rooms of Edinburgh or Glasgow. The elevation of gentry women to roles of importance and respect within gentry sociability was also a product of Enlightenment culture. The women that Boswell encountered acted as ornaments to the houses of their fathers or husbands. Their levels of accomplishment and gentility of manner was high and constantly remarked on by Boswell, since it seemed in striking contrast to the often modest character of their houses and their impoverished material environment. Flora Macdonald, for instance, now middle-aged and living in a simple house with a husband and family who were about to emigrate for want of better opportunities at home, was described by Boswell as 'a little woman, of a mild and genteel appearance, mighty soft and well-bred'.<sup>77</sup>

Notions of good family expressed in high levels of refinement and gentility were in striking contrast with the shabby conditions that were the lot of many families. Lady Macleod, wife of a clan chief and 'English-bred', 'who is a heroine for the clan' was obliged because of the 'difficulties of the family' to practise great economy – 'she is butler herself, even of the porter'.<sup>78</sup> Struggling attempts to overcome the financial limitations of their estates, coupled with a relentless rise in expectations born out of greater contacts with more prosperous areas outwith the Highlands yielded bitter disappointments for many families, played out against a weighty backdrop of clan-induced obligations and guilt. It is not surprising that so many gentlemen preferred to leave the Highlands behind and

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

remain unmarried rather than live on their hereditary lands. It is also not surprising that so many men who did marry now sought wives with fortunes from outwith the Highlands – an unthinkable idea in the early eighteenth century when the wives of the Highland gentry were Highland women, accustomed to Highland life and willing to live and work on their husbands' estates.

The Campbells of Barcaldine followed this route.<sup>79</sup> Alexander Campbell (1745-1800), eldest son of Duncan Campbell of Glenure and his wife Mary Macpherson of Glenorchy, was an advocate by training who lived for most of his life in Edinburgh. He was married in 1785 to Mary Campbell, daughter of John Campbell 'of the Bank', secretary to the Royal Bank of Scotland and a great financial and political connection of the duke of Argyll. It was an important marriage in strategic terms. But Mary Campbell, though of Highland background, was a city girl, Edinburgh bred, unaccustomed to full-time Highland living and unwilling to relinquish the comforts of Edinburgh. She had a close relationship with her own family, especially her mother and sisters, one of whom was married to David Dale in Glasgow. She and her husband established a home on the Barcaldine estate in their early married life, but had problems in finding suitable, modern medical attendance for her first confinement, which frightened the young wife. Following this crisis, Mary Campbell insisted that she and her husband return to Edinburgh. It was she who was responsible for the family acquiring a permanent house in the New Town of Edinburgh and for entering into the conspicuous consumption that went with such a house. She sent her eldest daughter to London for her education and began the family convention of visiting their estate mainly in the summer as a holiday place. The eldest son of this marriage, Sir Duncan Campbell of Barcaldine and Glenure (1786-1842) – a feckless man who gained a baronetcy but eventually lost the family fortunes – married Elizabeth Dennistoun of Colgrain (1792-1860), an industrial heiress from Dumbarton who was raised in Glasgow and Edinburgh. She had no family connections with the Highlands and her mother, who had grave objections to the marriage, was highly suspicious of her fortune-hunting spouse.<sup>80</sup>

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As these life histories suggest, by the early nineteenth century the Highland gentlewoman was a city resident whose experience of life in the Highlands was increasingly a transitory one, defined by summer holidays and only occasional periods of longer residence. Divorced from the reality of everyday existence for ordinary people, much of her understanding of Highland society and culture was shaped by romanticism. Her experience was also distinct from that of her forebears in her possession of sophisticated levels of literacy and her engagement in the middle class

<sup>79</sup> NAS, GD170.

<sup>80</sup> NAS, GD170/2350.

and gentry preoccupation with sensibility and reflection expressed in the written form. Gentry women with strong Highland connections wrote novels, stories, articles and diaries intended for publication, mostly for a female audience<sup>81</sup> – they were also great letter writers. Foremost among these was Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, daughter of an Invernesshire laird and his English wife.<sup>82</sup>

Elizabeth Grant was born in Charlotte Square in Edinburgh in 1797. She was the eldest child and had four younger siblings. Her father, John Peter Grant, was born into a cadet branch of the Clan Grant and was heir to a good income inherited from his uncle and from the family of his English mother. As a child, Peter Grant had spent his summers on his family estate and winters in the town of Elgin. He was educated for a legal career, first at the High School in Edinburgh and later at the College in Glasgow. His wife was the daughter of a wealthy north of England vicar. Though he inherited a tidy fortune, his financial management was poor and the family did not prosper. In the early 1820s, before she married, Elizabeth and her sisters – hounded by creditors and living in near penury with their mother in Invernesshire – wrote articles and short stories for magazines in an attempt to help the family finances.

Elizabeth Grant's life was largely that of an upper-middle class, city-dwelling professional-gentleman's daughter. As in so many Highland gentry families, including the Campbells of Barcaldine, her father pursued a legal career to generate a much-needed income. She lived in both London and Edinburgh and for a short time also in India, where her father went to advance his fortunes and where she met her eventual husband, an Anglo-Irish landowner. She was deeply imbued with a form of Highland identity that flowed from her family and clan. But this knowledge and culture was urban-romantic in its foundations and of an abstract character, not generated through sustained contact with Highland living in her formative years. The characters that peopled the novels of Walter Scott were cultural touch-stones as concrete to her as any actual people. Indeed, she described the wife of one of the Sobieski Stuarts – who were visitors with Fraser of Lovat in the Beaulieu Firth – as performing on the harp for the visiting crowds in the manner of a 'Flora MacIvor' in the novel *Waverley*.<sup>83</sup>

Although her life was one of relative detachment from the Highlands, the world she described was real enough and the account she gives of the house and estate that her father owned was typical of many areas of the Highlands by the early nineteenth century. It was striking for a tendency to be dominated by the middle-aged and elderly. The younger gentry, male and female, now lived elsewhere. The tenants on her father's farms were all relatives and half-pay officers, usually younger sons, cousins or the natural offspring of lairds, who had returned to their native

<sup>81</sup> D. Gifford and D. McMillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh, 1997).

<sup>82</sup> E. Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, ed. A. Tod (Edinburgh, 1992).

<sup>83</sup> Grant, *Memoirs*, ii, 187.



Highlands in middle life having mostly served abroad in the army. The combination of government pension and farm income allowed them to sustain a modestly genteel manner of living for themselves and for their wives, if they had them. Many were bachelors. The family house, Doune, was a sort of family asylum. Its permanent residents in 1803 comprised:

My great Uncle Sandy the Parson with his English wife, her sister and all their carpet work, two of the five sons, an old Donald, a faithful servant of my grandfather's ... and old Christy who had gone from Strathspey to wait on my father and my Aunt Lissy, and their Bonne Mrs Sophy Williams ... she had her pension and her attick and so had Mr Dallas, one of the line of tutors, when he chose to come to it.<sup>84</sup>

Barcaldine Castle, the oldest house belonging to the Campbells of Barcaldine, was similarly used as a 'family asylum' for elderly relatives and female dependants by the 1780s.<sup>85</sup>

The experience and expectations of Elizabeth Grant, like that of most of the daughters and wives of the Highland gentry by the early nineteenth century, was vastly different to that of her female forebears a hundred years before; with profound implications for families, the management of their estates and relationships with ordinary Highlanders. An understanding of these dynamics and pressures casts a differently hued and perhaps more sympathetic light on those many seemingly foolish or rapacious lairds who pursued policies of estate modernisation that brought such grief to the ordinary people. The undermining of clan relationships and Gaelic culture is better understood when the female dimension is added to the picture. In the political, commercial or military world gentry women held remarkably little formal power. But they did influence decisions that were taken within the private world of the family, and this in turn shaped the public world of men and their affairs.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 28-9.

<sup>85</sup> NAS, GD170/1185.